



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

office
file
3/20/56

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release to PM's, MARCH 19, 1956

REVISED REGULATIONS ISSUED FOR ALASKA COMMERCIAL FISHING

Extensive revisions of the annual commercial fishing regulations for the 1956 season in Alaska were announced today by Acting Secretary of the Interior Clarence A. Davis. The regulations will be effective 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.

Although most of the revisions were characterized by the Acting Secretary as "noncontroversial," he emphasized that five important changes will be in effect during the 1956 season. These he listed as follows:

- (1) Registration and limitation of fishing boats to one operating area to be selected by the operator;
- (2) Control of fishing on the high seas off the Alaska coast by United States nationals;
- (3) Limitation on the days per week of fishing in the Bristol Bay area, depending upon the number of units of gear operating;
- (4) Temporary closure during 1956 of 15 trap sites in the Prince William Sound area; and
- (5) Continuation during 1956 of the pink salmon restoration program in southeastern Alaska involving temporary closure of traps accounting for 50 percent of the trap catch of the area, and closure of extensive seine areas in the immediate vicinity of important salmon streams.

The last three changes which refer only to fishing in territorial waters are incorporated in the revised regulations announced today. At the same time the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a "notice of intention" concerning the other two items. This was done to put the industry and fishermen on notice that such regulations would be issued at a later date, to be effective in 1956. Since these changes represent radical departure from established procedures in regulating the Alaska commercial fisheries, more time is required by the Service for study and review before issuance.

The first of these new regulations--so-called "area licensing"--will deal with limitation as to place of operation by fishing boats in Alaskan waters. Although previously untested in Alaska, this has been under study for the past five years and has been discussed at public fisheries hearings in Alaska and Seattle, Wash.

Authorities on fisheries management concede that area licensing offers the most promise in solving the problem of spreading the fishing effort so that the proper balance between escapement and catch is maintained.

The second proposed regulation, designed to control fishing by United States nationals on the high seas of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea adjacent to Alaskan waters, awaits the consideration and approval of the American section of the North Pacific Fisheries Commission. The Commission has requested such a regulation. The purpose of the regulation is to prevent development of an American high seas salmon fishery which would intercept the Alaskan salmon runs before they reach waters now under regulation. It has been demonstrated that salmon can be taken in commercial quantities on the high seas to such an extent that protective measures imposed within territorial limits could be nullified.

The proposed limitation on fishing time in Bristol Bay is somewhat different than it has been in the past. This year the Service has included in the regulations a table showing the allowable number of days fishing each week with varying numbers of units of gear in operation. This will permit the operators to make more orderly plans for consolidation so as to tailor their operations to the number of fishing days per week they desire. The Service will require registration of drift and set nets to be operated in each district 30 days before the fishing season opens, and each week thereafter. This will facilitate setting the initial hours of fishing time.

Prince William Sound, which has been closed to pink salmon fishing for two years, will reopen this year. The operators have voluntarily offered to surrender 15 trap sites for 1956 which otherwise would be fished. Since this closure is in the interest of conservation and is similar, although less drastic than the trap curtailment program in southeastern Alaska, it has been incorporated into the regulations for 1956.

The Service reports that definite gains have been achieved by the restoration program imposed on the southeastern Alaska pink salmon fishery in 1954 and 1955. The spawning escapements in both years were better than in the parent years but still not adequate to restore the runs fully. There is almost unanimous agreement that the restoration program should be continued at least through 1956.

x x x